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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 002174

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: JEWISH COMMUNITY UNDERSCORES GROWING CONCERNS

REF: CARACAS 002094

CARACAS 00002174 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador met November 9 with fifteen Jewish community leaders to reinforce the USG's commitment to promoting religious freedom in Venezuela. All of the Jewish organization representatives expressed concern that President Chavez's government is fomenting anti-Semitism in Venezuela. They noted that pro-government media outlets' recent rhetorical attacks against the Jewish community and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's) close ties with Iran are particularly worrisome. Embassy will continue to stay in close touch with Jewish community leaders. End Summary.

Meeting with Jewish Community Leaders

¶2. (SBU) The Confederation of Israelite Associations in Venezuela (CAIV) hosted the Ambassador for lunch on November ¶9. CAIV's leadership and the presidents of six of CAIV's confederate institutions (a total of 15 Jewish community leaders) attended. PolCouns, PAO, and Poloff accompanied the Ambassador. PolCouns and Poloff also attended the Caracas B'nai B'rith Association's commemoration of the 69th anniversary of "Kristalnacht" the previous night. The Ambassador reiterated the USG's commitment to promoting international religious freedom and pledged to maintain the Embassy's close ties with Venezuela's Jewish community.

Jewish Community Concerns

¶3. (C) CAIV leaders noted that the Venezuelan government increasingly views the Jewish community as ideologically out of step with the Chavez administration. First, they said a high percentage of the Jewish community is made up of professionals and private businesspersons, sectors of Venezuelan society that Chavez refers to as "oligarchs." CAIV supports close Venezuelan ties with Israel; BRV foreign policy is increasingly vocal against Israel. Moreover, CAIV is friendly toward the United States, while Chavez accuses the United States of trying to destabilize his government. CAIV leaders reported that while Venezuelan Jews have not yet been the victims of physical anti-Semitic attacks, they fear that government-fanned anti-Semitism could lead to such violence.

¶4. (C) Jewish community leaders underscored a number of current concerns. They noted that government-run media outlets in recent weeks have broadcast incendiary rhetorical attacks on the Jewish community. These government media attacks allege without proof that Jewish religious and business leaders are funding anti-constitutional reform efforts and trying to destabilize the Chavez government (Reftel). They noted that the BRV is funding a traveling exhibit "10,000 Years of Palestinian History" that they believe propagates anti-Israel myths. They also expressed particular concern over the BRV's close and non-transparent ties with Iran.

¶5. (C) CAIV leaders also noted that the Jewish community has not been able to reestablish communication channels with senior BRV officials since Chavez, re-election and the departure of former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel. They said the Jewish community wrote to the Interior Ministry for police protection of synagogues during recent Jewish holy days, but received no response. Consequently, Jewish community leaders approached local police personnel directly and paid them to provide the additional protection. Against this discouraging backdrop, CAIV leaders said many of Venezuela's 15,000 member Jewish community, particularly young people, are emigrating to Europe and the United States.

Comment

¶6. (C) CAIV leaders are well aware of the government's ideological hostility toward the USG and did not ask for any specific USG actions at this time. At the same time, CAIV President Abraham Levy Benshimol and other CAIV leaders thanked the Ambassador for the USG's continued attention to the difficulties the Jewish community is confronting in

CARACAS 00002174 002.2 OF 002

Venezuela.

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